DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 665 SO 033 793

TITLE	Frontier Homes. Save Our History[TM]. Teacher's Guide.
INSTITUTION	A&E Network, New York, NY.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	6p.; Accompanying videotape not available from ERIC.
AVAILABLE FROM	A&E Television Networks, Attn: Community Marketing, 235 East 45th Street, New York, NY 10017 (videotape, $24.95). Tel: 877-875-3276 (Toll Free); Fax: 212-551-1540; e-mail: savehistory@aetn.com; Web site: http://www.historychannel.com/classroom/frontierhomes/index.html.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Architecture; *Built Environment; Heritage Education; *Housing; Intermediate Grades; *Land Settlement; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Student Educational Objectives; Television Viewing; *United States History
IDENTIFIERS	Frontier History; Historical Preservation; National History Standards

ABSTRACT

This lesson plan, based on the Arts and Entertainment documentary "Frontier Homes," consists of four segments which examine a style of historic dwelling built by settlers on the frontier: the post and beam structures built by English settlers in New England; the log houses constructed by pioneers on the forested frontier; sod houses erected on the prairies; and adobe houses crafted in the southwest. This unit combines the study of U.S. history with a lesson in material culture and environmental understanding. The four home segments include: (1) Plymouth Plantation, a living history museum in Plymouth, Massachusetts, that features examples of post and beam homes; (2) The Museum of Appalachia, Tennessee, where Swedish settlers first introduced log-style structures in the New World during the 18th century; (3) a demonstration of a "hands-on" approach on how to build a sod house in Minnesota; and (4) El Rancho Las Golondrinas, a living history museum outside of Santa Fe, New Mexico, that teaches about building the Spanish-American adobe home. This lesson plan provides an overview of these segments, previewing activities; vocabulary, understanding geography, and chronology; a graph of the home types; discussion questions; student activities; and relevant vocabulary. The lesson plan identifies which subjects are appropriate for study, grade level, national history standards, and student educational objectives. (BT)

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Frontier Homes. Save Our History. Teacher's Guide.

A&E Network, New York, NY.

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SAVE OUR HISTORY™

FRONTIER HOMES

Save Our History is The History Channel's Emmy-award winning national campaign dedicated to historic preservation and history education. Four times a year, The History Channel shows an original documentary highlighting an issue in historic preservation, accompanied by online educational materials. To learn more about the **Save Our History** campaign, visit **www.historychannel.com/classroom**.

Save Our History: ***Frontier Homes***, hosted by Ron Hazelton, is divided into four segments. Each segment goes on location to examine a style of historic dwelling built by settlers on the American frontier: the post and beam structures built by English settlers in New England; the log houses constructed by "pioneers" on the forested frontier; sod houses on the prairies; and adobe houses in the southwest. The documentary explores who built these homes, how they built them, and why they chose the specific materials, techniques, and tools needed for these different styles, within an historical and geographical context.

Frontier Homes combines the study of American history with a lesson in material culture and environmental understanding.

Subjects: American history, Hispanic culture, social studies, geography, environmental science.
Grades: Middle through High School.
National History Standards: *Save Our History: Frontier Homes* fulfills the following National Standards for History: Historical Thinking 1 (Chronological Thinking), 2 (Historical Comprehension), 3 (Historical Analysis), 4 (Historical Research) for United States History, Era 2, Standard 2 and Era 4, Standards 1 and 2.
Objective: Students will recognize that different types of dwelling structures were created at different times in American history, incorporating indigenous building materials, and reflecting influences from a variety of sources. Students will understand that standards of living and notions of privacy have changed over time.

INTRODUCTION

Each segment of *Frontier Homes* goes on location to examine a distinctive style and building technique for each historic dwelling archetype. In segment one, Ron Hazelton visits Plimouth Plantation, a living history museum in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and learns how traditional post and beam houses were built in the early seventeenth century. Post and beam houses were common in England, from where the large majority of British colonists along the eastern seaboard originated.

The second segment is based at the Museum of Appalachia, Tennessee, where we learn that Swedish settlers first introduced log-style structures in the New World during the eighteenth century. The freely available, local materials harvested from the forest and the earth, Old World cultural influences, and the climate determined the style of dwelling here as in the other locations.

Sod houses, built from bricks of prairie sod in the second half of the nineteenth century, were no exception. As in the other locations, Hazelton has a very "hands-on" approach to learning how to build a sod house in segment three, shot in Minnesota.

The last segment, on building the Spanish-American adobe home, is based at a living history museum, El Rancho Las Golondrinas, outside of Santa Fe. Originally built in the eighteenth century, the dwellings at Las Golondrinas are fascinating examples of adobe architecture. Even though Native Americans used adobe-type bricks for building materials, the Spanish settlers here were influenced primarily by North African construction techniques for building in dry, desert-like locations.

Previewing Activities: Vocabulary
There are many vocabulary words introduced in this documentary. Perhaps the most important word for students to understand, however, is *frontier*.

Ask your students to explain what frontier means. You may find that they refer vaguely to the American West of the nineteenth century, or to outer space as "the last frontier." Explain that frontier is based on the same word as "front." In this documentary, it means the border territory at the edge of settlement. Throughout American history, the frontier has been a shifting place, moving west as European settlers traveled inland from the Atlantic coast, or north as European settlers colonized areas north of Mexico City, the capital of New Spain. Even coastal New England and Virginia were once frontier areas, from the earliest English settlers' point of view.

Pioneer is another key word in this presentation. Help your class understand that the noun pioneer can describe anyone who is in the forefront of any endeavor or field. Ask them to use the word pioneer in a sentence that illustrates this concept. They may use it as a noun or a verb. (For example: "Through her advanced work with dogs, Dr. Gant was a pioneer in veterinary medicine.")

Other key words and phrases include: settlement, structure, timber, post and beam, thatch, wattle, daub, foundation, Great Plains, prairie, sod, homestead, high desert, adobe, "dirt cheap."

Previewing Activities: Understanding Geography and Chronology: Because *Frontier Homes* explores different geographical and chronological influences on building types, a brief map and time line activity is recommended. Using a map of the United States, have your students point out how the frontier moved from east to west and north of Mexico. Make sure they can locate Minnesota, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Tennessee. What does the location of these states tell your students about the climate in each area? What century did the Europeans permanently settle in each area? (Of course, Native Americans lived in these areas for centuries—sometimes thousands of years—before the arrival of the Europeans. They had their own building traditions that were highly adapted to the local environment. If your class has studied Native American life, you might want to mention this; see if your students can identify different types of Native American dwellings.)

Incidentally, log houses were popular throughout North America, wherever heavily forested areas existed, and were not limited to Tennessee. Post and beam houses followed the line of settlement. They could be found in all the original thirteen colonies and moved westward with the frontier.

VIEWING THE VIDEO

Save Our History: *Frontier Homes* is clearly divided into four parts. We recommend stopping the video at the end of each segment. Referring to the charts provided below, ask your students to provide the information requested.

Charting Information.
There are many ways to collect and record information while viewing a documentary, such as note-taking or outlining. Filling out a graph or a chart is another method. We have provided Chart A with some of the information filled in. You may make copies of this chart for your students to use while they are watching the documentary. They may fill it out in small groups or individually, as they watch or after they watch. Chart (B) has been filled in completely for your reference.

Alternatively, you can create a similar chart on the wall board and you can fill it in as an activity for your whole class.

FRONTIER HOMES: CHART 1

Type of House	Post and Beams	Log House	Sod House	Adobe
First Built	1600s			1700s
Influence	English	Swedish	(European*)	
Video Location	Tennessee	New Mexico		
Environment		Great Plains, prairie; no trees	High desert hot & cold	
Local Materials 1	Sawn logs			
Local Materials 2	Wattle & daub	Wood (a little)	Wood rafters	
Local Materials 3	Thatch	Chinking	Sand, straw	
Advantages	Long-lasting	Well-insulated		
Problems	Smokey, crowded			Repairs needed
Comments	Nails must be purchased.			

*The outside cultural influence on sod houses is not clearly stated in the documentary. Several different nationalities used bricks made out of peat or turf for inexpensive, temporary housing, but this is not mentioned in the video.

FRONTIER HOMES: CHART 2 FOR TEACHER REFERENCE

Type of House	Post and Beams	Log House	Sod House	Adobe House
First Built	1600s	1700	1800s	1700s
Influence	English	Swedish	(European*)	North African
Location in Documentary	Massachusetts	Tennessee	Minnesota	New Mexico
Environment	Woods, cold winters	Forested frontier	Great Plains, prairie; no trees	High desert; hot & cold
Local Materials 1	Sawn logs	Sawn logs	Sod bricks	clay
Local Materials 2	Wattle & daub	Daub (clay & straw)	Wood (a little)	Wood rafters
Local Materials 3	Thatch	Chinking		Sand, straw
Advantages	Cozy	Long-lasting	Well-insulated	Warm, easy
Problems	Smokey, crowded	Smokey, crowded	Damp, small	Frequent repairs
Comments	Nails were purchased.		Not built anymore	Very pretty

*The outside cultural influence on sod houses is not clearly stated in the documentary. Several different nationalities used bricks made out of peat or turf for inexpensive, temporary housing, but this is not mentioned in the video.

POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Discussion Questions

After your class has viewed the entire documentary and completed their charts, you may lead a discussion with the following questions:

1. Which homes do you think were the most adapted to their environment? Why? (Not everyone will agree, which is to be expected.)
2. All the structures in the video were small. Does the building style require that the houses be small?

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(Answer: No. These houses could be added on to and turned into very large houses. Or they could be built originally as much bigger structures. Sod houses were the most limited in their size.)

3. How would you feel about living in a one-room log cabin with ten other people? Do you think people in earlier times felt differently about their privacy? Do you think this is related to what people are accustomed to, or to human nature?
4. What do all the frontier homes have in common? (Answers include: People worked together to build them. Friends and neighbors helped each other. All the techniques used components from the soil to one extent or another. They were all adapted to the climate. They used materials that were freely available. Only a few of the materials were purchased.)
5. When you learned about these houses, what made you glad you live in a modern world? What would you like about living in one of the "Frontier Homes?"

Student Activities

Materials (these vary according to the activity): Poster board, pencils, colored pencils, rulers, drawing paper, writing paper, tracing paper, internet access.

1. Pretend you are a member of a frontier family in one of the locations described in the video. Write a journal entry about the building of your family's frontier house or about living in it. Include information about the interior, the exterior, the building materials, and your environment. Remember to date your journal.
2. You will need pencils, an eraser, a ruler, and drawing paper for this activity. Colored pencils are optional. Choose one of the building styles featured in the video. Sketch an exterior and an interior plan for the house in the style of your choice. Identify the materials used and important building techniques.
3. Research the use of the log cabin as a symbol in American history. Create a poster that illustrates the ways the log cabin has been used as a symbol/icon.
4. Trace a map of the United States on a piece of paper, or down load a map from the internet. The map does not need to be detailed – a blank map is ideal! Indicate on the map where the four building styles examined in Frontier Homes were popular, not just where the featured segment was located. Don't be surprised if the styles overlap. (For example, don't just pin point Sante Fe. Indicate where adobe building techniques were used generally.) Provide the century when they were first built.

FRONTIER HOMES VOCABULARY

adobe: (n) building material made of clay mixed with straw, often molded into bricks
daub: (n) mud or clay plaster smeared over a frame of woven sticks (**wattle**) used to build the walls of houses
"dirt cheap": (adj) costing very little
foundation: (n) sturdy, supportive base on top of which a house our building is erected
Great Plains: (n) vast grassland region of North America, much of which is used for cattle and wheat ranching; the Great Plains extend from southern Canada to Texas
High Desert: (n) region of North America bordered on the east by the Rocky Mountains and on the west by the Sierra Mountains; to the north, it includes the Snake and Columbia River plateaus and to the south, the Great Basin
homestead: (n) house and other buildings on a piece of land that usually is given to a settler to clear and cultivate
post and beam: (n) building technique that uses a long, thick piece of wood fixed in the ground vertically (post), connected to a horizontal piece of wood that supports the roof (beam)
prairie: (n) large open grassland that is flat or with rolling hills and very few trees
settlement: (n) small group of homes or people new to a region
sod: (n) top layer of soil held together by grass and matted roots, which can be cut into squares and used to build houses
structure: (n) something, such as a house or a bridge, that has been built
thatch: (n) plant material, such as straw or reeds, used for roofing
timber: (n) cut wood used for building
wattle: (n) woven frame of sticks or reeds to be covered with mud or clay plaster (**daub**) and used to build the walls of houses

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